

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEGUCI 03744 082028Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSC-01 HA-05
AID-05 TRSE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00
/063 W

-----003158 082040Z /73

O R 081900Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1152
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3744

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MPOL, SHUM, HO
SUBJ: HONDURAS' NEW GOVERNMENT

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 3731 (NOTAL), (B) TEGUCIGALPA 3737,
(C) TEGUCIGALPA 044

1. COMMUNIQUE ANNOUNCING REPLACEMENT OF CHIEF OF STATE GENERAL JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR CASTRO (REF A) BY THREE MAN JUNTA WAS READ OVER NATIONWIDE RADIO AUGUST 7 AT 2130 HOURS LOCAL TIME. TEGUCIGALPA AT MID-MORNING AUGUST 8 REMAINS QUIET WITH NO INCIDENTS REPORTED. NO SERIOUS OPPOSITION TO CHANGE EXPECTED, BUT STUDENT OR OTHER DEMONSTRATION CANNOT BE RULED OUT.

2. GENERAL MELGAR'S REMOVAL HAD BEEN WIDELY RUMORED FOR LAST SEVERAL WEEKS, BASED UPON HIS REFUSAL TO AGREE TO CHANGES WHICH THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL OF THE ARMED FORCES WANTED TO MAKE. RESIGNATIONS OR REMOVALS OF CABINET MEMBERS AND AUTONOMOUS AGENCY HEADS ARE EXPECTED TO BE MADE OFFICIAL SOON. ON LEAVING GOVERNMENTAL PALACE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 03744 082028Z

AUGUST 7 CESAR BATRES, PERSONAL ADVISER TO THE CHIEF OF STATE, PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION AND THAT OF OTHERS, BUT IT NOT CLEAR WHETHER ALL WILL BE ACCEPTED, BUT WILL PROBABLY INCLUDE CENTRAL BANK PRESIDENT BUESO, THE CIVILIAN CABINET AND HEADS OF CONADI, COHBANA, THE PORT AUTHORITY AND COHDEFOR. BATRES, HOWEVER, LEFT NO DOUBT HE WOULD NOT SERVE NEW GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING APPARENTLY IN HIS ROLE AS HEAD OF NEGOTIATING TEAM WITH EL SALVA-

DOR. HE COMMENTED THAT MELGAR HAD NOT RESIGNED BUT HAD BEEN REMOVED BY DECISION OF ARMED FORCES SUPERIOR COUNCIL.

3. NUMEROUS POLITICIANS INTERVIEWED ON EARLY MORNING RADIO PROGRAMS IN GENERAL EXPRESSED BELIEF THAT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS WOULD CONTINUE. THERE WAS VERY LITTLE NOTICEABLE REGRET FOR THE END OF THE MELGAR PERIOD ALTHOUGH HIS GOOD INTENTIONS WERE RECOGNIZED. ONE PROMINENT LIBERAL PARTY (PLH) COMMENTATOR NOTED THIS PROBABLY MEANT THE END OF MELGAR'S PRESUMED PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS, AND AS SUCH WAS WELCOMED BY THAT OBSERVER, PRIMARILY BECAUSE THE PLH HAS ALWAYS ASSUMED MELGAR WOULD BE THE NATIONAL PARTY'S CANDIDATE AND WITH MILITARY SUPPORT WOULD HAVE AN ADVANTAGE.

4. PENDING DEPARTMENT INSTRUCTIONS, THE EMBASSY AND ALL COMPONENTS ARE RESTRICTING ACTIVITIES AND CONTACTS WITH THE GOH. AID HAS MOMENTARILY DETERMINED TO HOLD UP DISBURSEMENTS. EMBASSY ASSUMES A NOTE INFORMING US OF THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT MAY BE RECEIVED SHORTLY. HOWEVER, FONMIN PALMA GALVEZ REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCED FROM BOGOTA THAT GOH DOES NOT CONSIDER A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN PLACE.

5. COMMENT: THE GOH COMMUNIQUE (REF B) REITERATES THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPECT FOR ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND PROMISES TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND PRESS FREEDOM. REMOVAL OF MELGAR IS THE CONTINUATION OF A PROCESS THAT HAS BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SOME
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEGUCI 03744 082028Z

TIME (REF C) BY WHICH THE "LIEUTENANT COLONES GROUP", WHICH DOMINATES THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL, HAS CONSOLIDATED ITS POSITION, AND REFLECTS THEIR DETERMINATION TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING. THIS DETERMINATION WAS INCREASED BY THE ONGOING NARCOTICS SCANDAL WHICH IMPUGNS THE GOOD NAME OF THE ARMED FORCES, BUT BASICALLY REFLECTS FEELING THAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD BECOME MORE INVOLVED. THIS CONFLICTED WITH THE RELATIVELY INDEPENDENT ROLE MELGAR HAD BEEN ABLE TO CARVE OUT FOR HIMSELF, WITHIN THE GENERAL GUIDELINES SET BY THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL. THERE IS NO REASON TO DOUBT THE APPARENT UNITY OF THE DEFENSE COUNCIL IN TAKING THIS DECISION.
JARAMILLO

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